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Mirror of Culture: the Study of a Nineteenth-century Sewing Diary

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Scottish historian Sir Walter Scott once remarked, "What is a diary as a rule? A document useful to the person who keeps it, dull to the contemporary who reads it and invaluable to the student, centuries afterward, who treasures it." From diaries it is possible to observe history through a first-hand perspective. But of what use could a sewing diary be? Surely a book filled with scraps of material and a few scribbles could not be an "invaluable" resource as Scott speaks of. On the contrary, upon analysis of Ann Eliza Cunningham's sewing diary, much can be ascertained from the tidbits of information scrawled alongside the fabric. Keying in on social history, Ann Eliza's diary opens up the nineteenth-century world of an upper-class girl born of a merchant family in Victorian New England.[1]

Early work in women's studies, introduced in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, primarily focused on women's employment in industry as well as the domestic setting. For the most part, women's history remained confined to these limited studies and biographical sketches of women who were famous only by marriage. It was not until the women's rights movement was raging in the United States that historical literature began to focus on women's role in the home. Barbara Welter pioneered the idea of the influence of "True Womanhood" on American society in her article "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860" published in the *American Quarterly* in 1966. Welter examined primary sources such as women's magazines and statements by religious leaders to substantiate a society in which females were dominated by expectations of men. The exact meaning of the phrase, Welter explains, was never explicitly defined in literature, but was generally understood by the masses to include ideals of

[1] The diary of Ann Eliza Cunningham rests in the library of the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts. (Accession number: 71.18) The museum acquired this diary in 1964 from the Roland B. Hammond Armorer's Shop in North Andover while still entitled the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum. With the help of the curator, Karen Herbaugh, I was allowed to transcribe the diary and take pictures in a setting fixed with color-corrected lighting. In addition to this paper, a complete transcription is available, along photographs taken of every page in the diary.

submissiveness, piety, domesticity, and purity. As to the popularity of the sentiment: "authors who addressed themselves to the subject of women in the mid-nineteenth century used this phrase as frequently as writers on religion mentioned God."[2] Welter laid the foundations for understanding the society in which women were confined to in their daily lives in the nineteenth century.

Mary Beth Norton led the women's studies movement for eighteenth-century women. In her book, *Liberty's Daughters: the Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, Norton analyzed the effect that the American Revolution had on the spirits of women. Norton views the American Revolution as a dramatic event which changed women's outlook regarding their own gender roles. To attain her perspective, Mary Beth Norton delved into a collection of women's private writings from the period being examined.[3] The use of these sources has made an increased appearance in historical debate, thereby allowing historians to better examine the private lives of individuals. Primary sources such as letters and diaries, like Ann Eliza Cunningham's, form the foundation of Norton's successful *Liberty's Daughters,* a book that affirms their success as mediums for historic reference.

Nancy Cott examined the lives of ordinary nineteenth-century American women in a similar fashion to Mary Beth Norton. Written three years before Norton's *Liberty's Daughters*, Nancy Cott chose to focus on women in the nineteenth century for her 1977 book *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. Cott maintained that there was a separate "woman's culture" in New England, which propagated the idea of a rigid gender divide in nineteenth-century America. Moreover, the idea of a "woman's culture" was directly connected with the activities women would participate in. Carl Degler's *At Odds: Women and*

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[2] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966): 151.
[3] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: the Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), xv.

the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present also studied women in the private sphere during nineteenth century. *At Odds* provides an important contribution to historical literature as it tracks the progression of the woman's role in the household through concentration on family life.

A number of other historians have taken an interest in women's history by conducting material culture studies. As women's historical literature became popular, diaries and letters have been increasingly used in examination of the lives "ordinary people" led to develop a unique social history. One notable example of this method is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale: the Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, published in 1990. In this book, Ulrich analyzed the diary of a midwife, Martha Ballard, who lived in Maine after the American Revolution. From Martha's diary, Ulrich pieced together a woman's place in Post-revolutionary New England, and also gained a sense of the overall community which Martha was part of.

Natalie Rothstein's *A Lady of Fashion: Barbara Johnson's Album of Styles and Fabrics* is more akin to the structure of this project than any of the aforementioned scholarly works. Unlike Martha Ballard's diary, Barbara Johnson's is a sewing diary from the eighteenth century. In addition to fabrics and dress descriptions, Barbara Johnson's sewing diary included fashion plates she had saved. Barbara Johnson's diary is an important resource for studying fashion and cultural history in the eighteenth century.

Analysis of Ann Eliza Cunningham's sewing diary is greatly based off of the approach to primary sources and focus on the individual as exemplified in *Liberty's Daughters* and *A Midwife's Tale*. Mary Beth Norton uses such primary source material to focus on the private lives of women during a time in which society molded its own view of the female role and

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich provides a model for understanding cultural history through one woman's diary. Nevertheless, the format of the project takes the direction of *A Lady of Fashion*.[4]

The backdrop of Ann Eliza's diary is nineteenth-century America, which brought much change for the young nation. In the antebellum era, sectionalism arose between the North and South while the abolitionist movement gathered strength. The Women's Rights movement also gained force, although it was still widely criticized. The Second Great Awakening took hold of the American people as the Panic of 1837 stifled the country economically. At home, elite women were being sent away to contemporary female colleges as the boys were being taught at deep-rooted institutions such as Harvard. Women's magazines were quite popular, most notably; *Godey's Lady's Book* began publication in 1830 and later *Peterson's* in 1842. The daguerreotype photograph came into society in 1839 and the first telegraph was sent on May 24, 1844. America was moving west in the Gold Rush and coping with the problems arising from expansion: the worst being slavery.

By 1861, sectionalists tensions could not endure anymore and the Civil War erupted. During one of the most tragic events in American history, resources became scare and the country's economy lay in shambles. Reconstruction ushered in a new era for America as the country tried to rebuild itself. The northeast experienced epidemics of scarlet fever, smallpox, cholera, and consumption as the nation's currency continued to deplete in value. In 1873, the United States adopted the gold standard as the Victorian Era reached its peak. America became the greatest industrial force in the world as immigration continued to fuel industry's cheap labor

[4] Other sewing diaries exist that are not in publication but could also be used for historical reference. The closest companion to Ann Eliza Cunningham's diary is one by her sister, Charlotte Augusta Lane, which is held in a private collection. The Joseph Downs Collection in Winterthur Delaware holds the Kate S. Harris fabric scrapbooks, which could also be of use to future historians.

supply and the transcontinental railroad allowed for faster shipments. As technology improved, products were produced with greater efficiencies, allowing prices to be lowered on such goods.

It was in this atmosphere that Ann Eliza composed her diary and recalled past events in her life. She wrote these memories in a bound scrapbook measuring nine by eleven inches approximately, and two and a half inches thick. The diary holds one-hundred forty-four pages in which Ann Eliza bound her fabric scraps. There is a patent date on the inside front cover which dates "March 28, 1876," therefore the diary could be no older than that. The Osborne Library, as part of the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts, preserves the diary over one hundred years later.

Ann Eliza structured her diary quite simply. The fabric scraps Ann Eliza selected were sewn in on the left-hand side of the page. The fabric was stitched into the paper and many pages contained only the stitches from the next page. Not every piece of fabric bore a description, but for those that did this would be located on the right-hand side of the fabric. In most cases Ann noted the year in which the fabric was bought and how she acquired it. In some instances there would also be a description detailing how she used the fabric or an event that occurred while making the garment. By Ann Eliza's descriptions, reliance on scholarly works concerning historic costume, and references to popular ladies' magazines of the nineteenth century, it is possible to imagine what Ann would have worn on different occasions.

Many descriptions appear throughout the diary in regards to who *cut* the material. This detail is significant to understanding the costume production process of the period. Commercially produced dress patterns were not available until 1854, but did not gain popularity until the 1860s.[5] Although introduced during Ann's lifetime, commercial patterns were slowly

[5] Patricia A. Cunningham. *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art*. (London: Kent State University Press, 2003), 12.

incorporated into American society. In the meantime, Ann Eliza would rely on a more traditional form of dressmaking. To cut cloth in preparation for dressmaking required a certain amount of talent. Many women depended upon these gown-makers to help them prepare a dress for sewing, especially the more elaborate ones, such as formal evening gowns.[6] Therefore, despite who would construct the final garment, a gown-maker's talents may have been employed. Alternatively, some women sent their fabric to be cut simply as a way to save time. Others, being especially frugal in mind, sent fabrics to be cut as a preventative measure against wasted material. It was economical to employ a cutter since labor charges could be as low as five percent of the cost of the material.[7] Rhoda Saville's name appears most often in Ann Eliza's diary; however there were other cutters as well, both male and female. It seems that, on most occasions, Ann or her mother finished the dresses after they were cut rather than having them completely made by a gown-maker.

Ann Eliza's diary includes many fabrics that were popular in her era, such as silk, wool, and cotton. Ann held a unique position as the daughter of a sea merchant. As such, her father had the abilities to bring Ann Eliza many different fabrics in many different colors. Perhaps it is because she had so many fabrics that Ann set down to creating her sewing diary in the first place. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Ann would have had an abundance of fabric had it not been for her father's profession.

Ann's father was Oliver Griffin Lane, a sea captain of the ship "Gloucester," which made berth from Annisquam, Massachusetts. In the early nineteenth century, Annisquam was a thriving shipbuilding community in Gloucester. The community's significance was described by James Hill Fitts, author of the *Lane Genealogies* as "vessels of good reputation were built at

[6] Marla R. Miller, "Gownmaking as a Trade for Women in Eighteenth-Century Rural New England," *Dress*, 30 (2003): 25.
[7] Miller, 25-26.

'Squam."[8] However, the town's influence in the sea industry died down with the Panic of 1837 which brought an economic recession to the United States.[9] Oliver Griffin Lane traveled to Europe, South America, and "Down East" (Asia) as part of his merchant business. On select voyages, his wife Charlotte Pippen, who he married on December 22, 1822, accompanied him. The family was of the Universalist faith and paid one-hundred dollars for first choice in choosing a church pew, yet picked an undesirable one.[10] The couple had seven children, five of whom survived childhood. Ann Eliza was their youngest daughter.

Ann Eliza was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts on September 6, 1835. Like her sister Charlotte Augusta, Ann attended the academy at Lunenburg. On June 12, 1856, Ann married James A. Cunningham who was five years her senior. For a short time the wedded couple lived in Lunenburg, but later moved to Annisquam. James ran a stage coach line between Annisquam and Gloucester until the Civil War broke out and he became the first lieutenant of the 32nd Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers. Working his way up in military service, by December 1866 James accepted the rank of brevet brigadier general. James remained in military service until 1879 as an adjutant general while serving in the Massachusetts legislature. He was a freemason and managed a soldiers' home in Chelsea until his death on July 17, 1892. Together Ann Eliza and James had three children who survived childhood: Charles Edward (1857), Frederick Lane (1858), and Anne Grafton (1870).[11] It is thought that Ann lived into the twentieth century, as the genealogical records published in 1902 indicate that she was still living.[12]

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[8] James Hill Fitts, *Lane Genealogies*, 3 vols. (Exeter: The Newsletter Press, 1902), III, 310.
[9] Fitts, 311.
[10] Fitts, 312.
[11] Ann's diary contained some fabrics used for her children's clothing. She mentions clothing her boys Charles and Frederick in dresses, indicating that they were very young when they wore such an outfit. Until five or six, both boys and girls wore dresses or skirts. Anne Grafton is not mentioned in Ann's diary, for unknown reasons.
[12] Fitts, 316.

Ann's diary spans from 1845 to 1890. Since the patent date is 1876, and the last date recalled in the diary is 1890, it would be modest to consider that Ann compiled her diary sometime in her forties or fifties. The earliest event recalled is from when Ann was ten years of age, in describing a floral checked fabric, "Olly bought in Boston."[13] "Olly" most likely designates her brother Oliver Griffin Lane, Jr., who was twenty-two at the time. By 1890, Ann Eliza had already married James, born her children, attended several weddings including her own sons, and experienced many deaths including her parents and four brothers.

New England during Ann Eliza's lifetime was a section of America that was bustling with economic growth, primarily in the textile industry. It was not so much that the machinery used in production was changing, but what economists call the "sub-process" of manufacture.[14] The technology that spurned rapid production of cloth, the power loom, had already been in use in New England since 1816 when the Boston Associates invested in replicating the English machines in America.[15] The changed sub-process, however, is split into two categories measured by one hour; one category recognizes rate of production per machine while the second refers to the number of workers required to complete a task.[16] With the first category, the labor supply would remain unchanged, yet there would be more productivity.

Efficiency is the factor that transformed New England industry during Ann Eliza's lifetime, more so than new technology.[17] One example of this new industriousness was bigger machines. Textile factories began to use machines which had bigger bobbins. Since the bobbin

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[13] Ann Eliza Lane Cunningham, *Sewing Diary*, p. 16.
[14] Synnott, 153.
[15] Paul E. Rivard, *A New Order of Things: How the Textile Industry Transformed New England*. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002), 46.
There were other efforts to integrate mechanical looms, most notably in Rhode Island, however the Boston Associates invested the most capital and showed the most success.
[16] Thomas Whitney Synnott, *Investment Policies, Growth, and Profitability in the New England Cotton Textile Industry, 1830-1914* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 146.
[17] Synnott, 143.

size was increased, twice as much yarn could be held by one machine, thereby limiting the amount of times the bobbin would be changed each day.[18] Changing parts took a certain amount of time and labor; therefore, decreasing the times it took to change the bobbins increased productivity without altering the amount of workers per machine. Another labor-saving method of "Yankee ingenuity" was the ability to increase spindle speed. Between 1840 and 1915 spindle speed steadily increased by over four-thousand rotations per minute. These lighter and faster spindles not only increased the production time, but allowed cotton strands to undergo the entire process with less strain on the thread, reducing breakage. Labor expenditures were saved by decreasing maintenance and increasing production time.[19] Such an increase in productivity allowed the price of cotton goods to decrease. Cotton fabric prints were therefore cheaper to buy, making them more common in fashion.

The most common fabric in Ann Eliza's diary is printed cotton, which remains just one indicator of its popularity. Since cotton prints became so cheap, Ann was able to own many different colors and patterns. Formerly very expensive, printed designs on fabric became progressively integrated into the textile industry with new technology to facilitate mass production which decreased the cost of the finished product. The first method, done domestically, was called "block printing," in which the fabric would be stamped with wood blocks.[20] Copper plates were then used in this process in conjunction with new machinery enabling the entire method to become mechanical. Technology improved this process by devising rollers, which were engraved and could also be run mechanically, thus speeding the printing procedure. This process also used the copper plates from plate printing, but made for a

[18] Synnott, 145.
[19] Synnott, 145.
[20] Rivard, 67.

continuous motion.[21] The speed and newfound efficiency in production processes made cotton fabric cheaper than ever.[22] Lower production costs allowed prices to drop, which ultimately allowed for an increase in women's wardrobes. No longer were women constrained by their finances to only a few dresses; cheaper cotton fabrics expanded and diversified their wardrobe. By 1889 "ready-to-wear" clothing had made its way into society: a direct result of an efficient textile industry.[23]

Another reason Ann's collection is so great is due to her father's position. As a sea merchant, Oliver Griffin Lane had access to many textile merchants. Many of Ann's fabrics sewn into her diary bear a description stating that the fabric was a gift from her father or uncle, who was also in the sea trade. During the nineteenth century the sea industry was a powerful force in New England despite the increase use of steam-powered trains in the transportation of products. As an attest to the prominence of seafaring in Massachusetts society, the seal of Salem bears the motto, "to the farthest port of the rich East."[24] William F. Robinson, author of *Coastal New England: its Life and Past*, described the changing nature of the northeast coast's industry as "many of the old ways, but not shipbuilding, vanished." Robinson went further to express the importance of shipbuilding by stating, "more and more vessels were needed to meet the factories' ever-increasing demand for materials such as raw silk from China, shoe leather from California and Argentina, and cotton from New Orleans."[25] All these places, with the exception of Argentina, Oliver Griffin Lane was known to have traveled to.[26]

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[21] Rivard, 68.
[22] Rivard, 48.
[23] Rivard,. 78.
[24] Alexander Laing, *The American Heritage History of Seafaring America*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 70. This motto, "DIVITIS INDIÆ VSQVE AD VLTIMVM SINVM," remains in Salem's seal to this present day.
[25] William F. Robinson, *Coastal New England: its Life and Past*. (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1983), 124.
[26] Christina H. Nelson, *Directly From China: Export Goods for the American Market, 1784-1930*. (Salem, MA: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1985), 34.

Next to many of the fabrics sewn into Ann Eliza's diary the phrase, "from father's store" is written. This refers to a system of commerce that many sea captains in the nineteenth century participated in. Upon coming back from such far-reaching voyages as China, many captains would open up a sort of "store" to sell their cargo. Some captains used their own ships for this process while others, such as Ann's father, used their own home. Oliver Griffin Lane had his store in a cottage next to their house in Annisquam. At present, this same little store is used as a little summer house.[27]

In Oliver Griffin Lane's position as a sea captain, it is likely that he retired from the sea around the age of forty-five or fifty. While in retirement, many sea captains held places of esteem within the community.[28] It is likely that Mr. Lane received such esteem from his community. Combined with the monetary profits from the sea trade and the respect given to Mr. Lane, the family would have been in a privileged social class. One example of the great respect held for the Lane family was Charlotte Augusta Lane's surprise party.

Celebrations were an important part of New England life, especially for members of high society. On February 20, 1883, when Ann's sister Charlotte's birthday came around, members of the town threw her a surprise fiftieth birthday party. Charlotte was very active in the town church throughout her life, and remained a spinster since the death of her beau, Charlie Trask. Since Charlotte held an active role in her community, there were about one-hundred guests in attendance at her Annisquam home, which Charlotte took control of upon her father's death in 1867. It is noted in the *Lane Genealogies* that Charlotte danced the Virginia Reel and her niece

[27] Elizabeth Enfield, "The Reminiscences of Aunt Tot: a Diary of Charlotte Augusta Lane, 1833-1925." American Dress as Social History, Abstracts, Costume Society of America Symposium; May 15-18, 1991, Boston, MA, 9.
[28] Robinson, 132.

Helen played piano for the guests.[29] The party commenced at eight o'clock at night with refreshments served at ten. In between these hours there was dancing, music, and socializing, all which concluded at midnight. Ann Eliza was a prominent guest at this party; James Hill Fitts reprinted an article from the *Cape Ann Advertiser* stating, "Mrs. J.A. Cunningham, a sister of Miss Lane, was present and in her kindly manner did much to make everyone happy."[30]

Ann Eliza was also at another birthday party of great significance to her. A birthday party for her mother-in-law, Martha Putnam Cunningham was held on January 21, 1850. Ann wore a dress made out of a dark blue cotton print with white horizontal stripes that were of different widths but evenly spaced. The fabric was bought by Mrs. Cunningham in Boston, and Ann had the dress made up by Miss Longley to wear to her mother-in-law's birthday party.[31]

Another celebration Ann Eliza put emphasis on in her diary was Thanksgiving. Next to a dark swatch of fabric with a floral design against a black background, Ann wrote "Mother bought in Boston in 1851/ Rhoda Saville cut it plain/ think it was finished for thanksgiving/ Aunt Hannah Aunt Emily + family/ praised thanksgiving with us/ The last Thanksgiving that Grandmother Lived."[32] Since Thanksgiving was observed as a time for family, it is not unusual that Ann remembered her grandmother in this way.

Thanksgiving was a deep-rooted tradition in New England history even before it became a national holiday. Due to the long-standing nature of the holiday, it has been described as "distinctly American."[33] The holiday allowed for quiet reflection on one's gifts from God, as

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[29] Helen was the daughter of Oliver Griffin, Jr. and Clara Pearce Griffin. When Clara died (most likely due to childbirth of her son, who also died) Charlotte raised Helen in her own home. She was thirty-four at Charlotte's fiftieth birthday party.
[30] Fitts, 314-315.
[31] Cunningham, 56.
[32] Cunningham, 76.
[33] Maymie Richardson Krythe, *All About American Holidays*. (New York: Harper, 1962), 232.

well as a family celebration of mutual praise.[34] A day of thanksgiving was declared inconsistently in the seventeenth century by individual colonies until the late eighteenth century brought a consistent annual celebration. Sarah Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, respected Thanksgiving so much that she pushed for the holiday to be nationalized through statements in her magazine. By October 1863, President Lincoln declared the last Thursday in November a day of national Thanksgiving.[35] Preparations for the day were made weeks in advance, but the day itself proved peaceful and joyous through church services and family gatherings.[36]

The family gatherings on Thanksgiving proved a canvas for the success of the family the previous year. Dinner was served consisting of a variety of meats, breads, puddings, and pies. For those not aligned with the temperance movement, there was also an array of ales, wines, and hard ciders. As one man observed of the lavish Thanksgiving meal, "it ought to be said that there was no other day on which we had four kinds of pies on the table and plum pudding besides."[37] When New England families could not afford such extravagance the community stepped in to donate food and drink.[38]

Christmas was also a time for revelry and bountiful gatherings. Ann Eliza mentioned two Christmases in which she was given fabric as a present. In 1862 or 1863, Oliver Griffin Lane gave her daughter a red plaid, wool fabric with dark blue, dark green, yellow, and white mixed in.[39] A man named "Tuft" also gave Ann a purple cotton fabric as a Christmas present in 1880. Purple was very popular in the late nineteenth century, however Ann did not have too much of it. Once a color worn only by royalty and the wealthy elite, purple became commonplace as dye

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[34] Jane C. Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860*. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 261.
[35] Nylander, 263.
[36] Nylander, 264.
[37] Nylander, 276.
[38] Nylander. 277.
[39] Cunningham, 10.

technology improved.[40] Even though purple was no longer expensive, Ann preferred pattern prints and madder colors, which were also quite popular.[41] Madder prints were found in abundance in Ann's diary along with check and plaid fabrics. While plaids were also popular in the Victorian age, it seems Ann personally liked these fabrics. The lack of purple fabrics in Ann's diary despite the popularity of the color hints to Ann's personal taste. Nevertheless, the purple fabric was important enough for Ann to receive as a present in addition to the practicality of the gift.

Like Thanksgiving, Christmas was a holiday recognizing the importance of family. Every year on December 25th, Christ's birth would be celebrated by those of Christian faith. Ann Eliza's family was active participants in the Universalist church, and would have likely been very attached to the spirit of Christmas. Although in 1812 the recognition of Christmas by those of Universalist faith was referred to as "somewhat extraordinary" in 1812; as the Puritanical influence over New England diminished in the nineteenth century, the acceptance of Christmas increased.[42] The celebration of Christmas followed the same arrangements as Thanksgiving, but included presents. Last-minute preparations, church services, and family gatherings were among the activities of the day. Houses would also become festively decorated at Christmastime, designating the arrival of the "Christmas season." Evergreen trees, holly, ivy, and the flirtatious mistletoe would be staples in households.[43] Thanksgiving held more popularity due to some religion's disagreement with the secular nature of Christmas and its

[40] Deborah Kraak. "Purple Reign: Celebrating 150 yeras of Synthetic Dyes," Lecture, University of Rhode Island; March 9, 2006, Kingston, RI.
[41] Riverd, 69.
[42] Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: a History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31.
[43] Krythe, 255.

tradition of gift-giving.[44] The holiday did not even hold legal recognition in Massachusetts until 1855.[45]

One of the Christmases Ann took note of was 1862, the year James Cunningham served as captain for the Union army. Ann does not write in her diary if James had been at home for Christmas during any year of the Civil War, however, it is likely that he had missed Christmases. A wartime Christmas was a very solemn occasion; one in which families would still be grateful for their bounties and their bonds, but would also pray for peace and mourn their losses in the previous year. Unable to leave the battlefield for home, Robert E. Lee wrote to his wife on Christmas Day, "I am grateful for the many [Christmases] among the past that I have passed with you, and the remembrance fills me with pleasure. For those on which we have been separated we must not repine…now we must be content with the many blessings we receive."[46] Meanwhile, ladies magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book* continued to print drawings of a complete household along with preparation tips and recipes. The Civil War itself has been attributed to solidifying Christmas into American society, as the call for unity and gratitude during those years were associated with nationalism.[47]

Of all the events in Ann Eliza Lane Cunningham's life, her wedding to James A. Cunningham on June 12, 1856 was among the most significant. At the age of twenty-one, Ann had crossed the divide between childhood and adulthood. This was a significant step in a woman's life in the nineteenth century, and therefore greatly celebrated by the bride, her family, and her community. Ann Eliza had two diary entries concerning her wedding. Writing next to a white cotton print with broken yellow diagonal stripes bore the description, "mother bought at

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[44] Krythe, 260.
[45] James H. Barnett, *The American Christmas: a Study in National Culture*. (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 20.
[46] Philip Van Doren Stern, ed., *The Civil War Christmas Album*. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), 18.
[47] Restad, 91.

Mr Calefs 1856/ one of my wedding dresses./ Rhoda Saville cut it"[48] Similarly, next to a sheer white and blue plaid cotton swatch Ann wrote, "one of my/ wedding dresses/ in 1856"[49]

The term "one of" in addition to the color combination and design of the fabrics indicate that Ann wore two dresses on her wedding day. Since a wedding was an occasion which filled the entire day, upper class women would still be expected to confine themselves to the fashion regulations. In the nineteenth century, there was a rigid system of dress for women that mandated separate attire in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Daytime dresses were more reserved and one-piece while evening dresses had a lower neckline, shorter sleeves, and of two-piece construction.[50] Ann Eliza most likely had an afternoon and an evening dress. Neither of these dresses, however, were solid white.

The modern wedding dress is usually white, the traditional color associated with purity. The virtuous significance of white was not unknown to women in the nineteenth century. One mother, Anna Matilda King, wrote to her daughter Florence in 1851, "I love to see you all in *white* – the most becoming dress in my opinion for young girls – *Typical of purity*."[51] White was also lauded by ladies magazines such as *Peterson's Magazine* and *Godey's Lady's Book*. These publications often featured images of the ideal wedding dress made of "white silk, trimmed with three deep lace flounces…sleeves and basque to correspond. The head-dress is composed of a wreath of myrtle and superb lace veil."[52] A dress of this description would be particularly extravagant, and would only be used on one occasion. The lace alone would put a great burden

[48] Cunningham, 42.
[49] Cunningham, 48.
[50] Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume: a History of Western Dress, 3rd ed*. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1998), 309.
[51] Anna Matilda King to Florence King, 22 November 1851, *Anna*, 113.
[52] "Figure 1," *Peterson's Magazine*, 1856, 273.

upon one's purse let alone the minimum of ten yards of fabric that would make the skirt.[53] Since skirts had reached maximum width in the mid-1850s, giving the skirt a "dome-like look," more fabric was needed to complete a woman's dress.[54] Consequently, to wear such an expensive dress for one occasion only would not only be seen as impractical, but fiscally irresponsible to notoriously frugal New Englanders. Thus, white was not the standard, even for women of Ann Eliza's social standing.[55] While women's magazines included fashion plates of white dresses, Ann Eliza may have looked at the remaining plates in the issue to gather ideas for her own dresses. The goal was to wear a fine dress that one could wear again. The fabric that Ann used suggests that she did just that.

In some traditions a honeymoon taken by the newly-married couple traditionally follows a wedding. From the sewing diary alone it is not possible to tell if Ann did this, however on various occasions she did note certain travels. Just as the steamship and transcontinental railroad spurred industry, it also fueled the growth of tourism.[56] In the Victorian age, tourism opened up to a wider market as means to travel became easier and therefore more affordable to the masses. As the daughter of a sea captain, Ann had uncommon access to tourism both through the nature of her father's business and the family economics. While it is not known if Ann took any voyages with her father, it has been documented that Ann's mother, Charlotte Pippen Lane, accompanied her husband on many voyages to South America, Europe, and around Cape Horn to California.[57]

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[53] Catherine S. Zimmerman, *The Bride's Book: Pictorial History of American Bridal Dress*. (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 91.
[54] Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Fashionable Lady in the 19th Century*. (London: Stonebridge Press, 1960), 5.
[55] Zimmerman, 106.
[56] Rivard, 126.
[57] Fitts, 313.

It was not entirely uncommon in the nineteenth century for sea captains to bring their wives with them on voyages. Some women even birthed children on trade ships. However, as a ship could be at sea anywhere from weeks to months, it took a sturdy lady to live on the sea.[58] In 1849, the shortest voyage between New York and China was seventy-five days. It is believed that Oliver Griffin Lane went to China as part of his business; however his ship was probably not as fast as the *Flying Cloud*: the clipper ship that was built for speed and set the record on various excursions.[59] Nevertheless, Charlotte Pippen braved this difficult lifestyle on multiple occasions to be in the company of her husband.

The trips Ann wrote about were not as far-reaching as China. The closest touring Ann mentioned was the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Next to a dark blue cotton fabric with white half-circles Ann wrote, "made 1890/ wore at white mountains/ in September."[60] The White Mountains were valued for their landscape: a distinct attraction of tourism. So much were these secluded landscapes praised that, "by the 1840s, the literati of the eastern towns and cities were making excursions into the wilds to collect 'impressions.'"[61] The White Mountains had become a popular leisure destination by the mid-nineteenth century, as the search for "wild landscapes" became popular in the United States.[62]

For the sight-seeker who was not so adventurous for fresh mountain air, there was New York City. When Ann Eliza visited New York City it was quite an occasion, as her journey was marked by a party. Alongside a madder floral and striped print fabric swatch, Ann wrote, "Mother bought at Mr Calefs in/ Glouster 1853. Rhoda cut it/ wore it to church in Spring when/

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[58] Laing, 168.
[59] Laing, 268.
[60] Cunningham, 38.
[61] John Towner, *An Historical Geography of Recreation and Tourism in the Western World, 1540-1940*. (New York: John Wiley, 1996), 158.
[62] Towner, 161-162.

just made. Went to New York for/ the first time. The Spring it was made/ Father gave a large party the week/ before we left for New York./ Annie Walker present."[63] From this entry it is indiscernible whether Oliver Griffin Lane joined his daughter on their trip; since New York City was a trading center for the country it is possible he went on business. Nonetheless, New York City was an exciting place for business or pleasure.

The lure of New York city included the attraction of a sea-side vacation. Coney Island attracted upper class travelers, as did Manhattan Beach. Overall, however, New York City provided the tourist with what John Towner, author of *An Historical Geography of Recreation and Tourism in the Western World, 1540-1940*, calls, "divorce from the geographic environment."[64] New York City had essentially replaced the natural landscape of the area entirely in favor of man-made architecture and attractions. Even Central Park did not come into existence until 1857, four years after Ann's visit.[65] Ann Eliza visited the city while the urban park movement was underway, ensuring that most of her entertainment be confined in-doors.[66]

California in the nineteenth century presented an interesting adventure. The Gold Rush alone brought hundred of people to the sparsely populated territory; in fact, travel to California was so popular that production of the fast clipper ships reached its height in the mid-nineteenth century. The vast expeditions to California lead to the Gold Rush to be described as "the most remarkable ten years of sail in the history of the world."[67] So much was the demand for ships to

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[63] Cunningham, 82.
[64] Towner, 192-193.
[65] Towner, 40.
Central Park was entirely man-made, including the lakes or "water basins" that are featured there. "The Ramble" section was specifically designed by the architects to resemble an untouched landscape, thus giving the appearance of a natural landscape within the busy city.
[66] Towner, 227.
[67] Laing, 277.

sail to California in the Gold Rush that more than two-hundred lay vacant in San Francisco, having no use for a return voyage.[68]

Given that Ann Eliza visited California in 1886, it is unlikely that she sought gold herself. Ann probably went for the landscape, however, not solely California's. In the nineteenth century, the actual voyage was considered to be part of the vacation itself. John Towner described this concept as, "although travel was often slow and uncomfortable, there was a pleasure in viewing the slowly unfolding landscape."[69] Ann does not divulge how she went to California; she simply wrote next to a dark blue cotton fabric, "wore to California in 1886."[70] The transcontinental railroad was connected in the United States in 1869, allowing the possibility of travel by rail. It is also possible that Ann went by ship. Ann's mother traveled around Cape Horn to reach California, however others, like Robert Gardner in 1858, reached California by passing through Panama first.[71]

Panama itself was also a focal point in tourism. In 1848, the United States Congress granted a subsidy to Edward K. Collins to run a scheduled steamship line to the Isthmus of Panama in return for mail service aboard their ships.[72] Scheduled steamships made distant travel easier and practical. Perhaps Ann took one of these ships when she described her trip next to a white cotton fabric with a branch design as, "Father brought home in 1841/ Mother had one like it. She wore/ it in Crossing the isthmus of/ Panama in 1851, Her mule sunk/ in the mud."[73] In most instances there was a steamer waiting on the Pacific Ocean side to board the travelers, who were weary at that point.

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[68] Laing, 276.
[69] Towner, 255.
[70] Cunningham, 34.
[71] Elizabeth Lykken, "Robert Gardner's Buckskin Suit: a Material Culture Study." Thesis (M.S.), University of Rhode Island, 2004, 7.
[72] Laing, 290.
[73] Cunningham, 42.

Two years before Ann went to the Isthmus of Panama, *Godey's Lady's Book* printed an article detailing one man's experience on such a vacation from his own account. In three pages, this author described Panama as having "the most beautiful and wildly romantic character."[74] He continues to describe the forestry and the animal life. However, the novelty of the country slowly wore off as this tourist was forced to sleep in a canoe and encounter the local population. Upon ending the excursion he wrote, "all of us, whether Americans or English, united in a hearty cheer to that [British] flag, which was a token to us that we had at last escaped the countries of vice, and were passing from the annoyances of South American life to the solid comforts of an English home."[75] A trip to Panama, it seems, was not for the weak of heart.

Looking at Ann Eliza's family history, it appears that she was not weak at all. Death and illness were an integral part of life in the nineteenth century. Two of Ann's brothers did not survive childhood and during the Civil War Ann would have feared for her husband's safety. In December of 1848 however, Ann's family received devastating news. Next to a wool plaid fabric Ann wrote, "Cloak Father/ bought in Boston/ in 1848. Rhoda/ Saville cut it/ a long cloak with/ large circular/ cape. While she/ was at work on it/ the news came that/ Uncle Davis Lane/ had committed suicide/ at the Pearl Street House/ Boston"[76] Davis was a sea captain like Ann's father. The *Lane Genealogies* omits details of Davis's death, excepting that he was forty-five years old.[77]

The Pearl Street House was an inn that was located on the northwest corner of Milk and Pearl Street in Boston. It was originally built as the home of William Pratt, however by 1836 the residence was converted to an inn. Inns provided rest for the weary traveler, food for visitors,

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[74] "A Trip Across the Isthmus of Panama," *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1829, 324.
[75] "A Trip Across the Isthmus of Panama," 324.
[76] Cunningham, 12.
[77] Fitts, 356.

and ale for those looking for company. The Pearl Street House was ruined by fire on November 8, 1872.[78]

The Lane family was of Universalist faith, so they would not be so condemning of Davis Lane's suicide as general society in the nineteenth century would have been. Suicide was traditionally seen as a disgrace, and more importantly: the ultimate sin against God. Ann would have been thirteen at the time of her uncle's suicide. Because of her age, Ann would have still worn clothes of a young lady not yet a woman, yet she would still be confined to mourning restrictions. Queen Victoria, who held a strong influence over the tradition of mourning wear advised that even very small children should dress in mourning. Queen Victoria even went so far as to scold her oldest daughter for not dressing her five-month old child in appropriate mourning attire.[79] Mourning wear proved especially difficult for children due to limited finances of ordinary families and the rapid pace at which children outgrown their clothes. This problem was normally avoided by dyeing everyday clothes black.[80]

Children's attire would not be the only clothes to be dyed during a period of mourning. Since new clothes were expensive, many adults would simply dye their clothes as well. Such was the case when Ann's sister, Charlotte Augusta Lane's beau died. In Charlotte's sewing diary it is written, "dyed this dress black, the summer Charlie Trask died."[81] Charlotte was twenty-five at the time and would never marry. Mourning wear made apparent the personal loss Charlotte felt at losing Charlie. Even in deep mourning, Charlotte remained frugal in her mourning wear decisions though the ladies' fashion magazines featured fashionable mourning

[78] David M. Balfour, "Taverns of Boston in Ye Olden Time," *The Bay State Monthly* 2, no. 2 (November 1984): 422.
[79] Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: a Costume and Social History*. (Boston: G. Allen and Unwin, 1983), 179.
[80] Taylor, 177.
[81] Enfield, 9-10.

attire.[82] Yet, when Charlie Trask died in 1854, mourning wear had only begun to reach "cult" levels and remained a staple in elite society.[83] Ann does not become widowed until 1892, but makes no note of it in her diary. The last date she mentions is 1890, when she traveled to the White Mountains.

Many pages are filled with Ann's recollections of her life, yet fifteen are left completely blank and there are over two hundred fabric swatches that remain without description. What of these? Did Ann forget what she did with some of these fabrics, include them simply for aesthetic value, or neglect her diary? These are questions that cannot be answered but are interesting to think about. During a century in which paper was very valuable, so much that even wealthy women would write on both sides of a page and in two directions to get the most use out of a sheet, Ann left many pages in her diary vacant of writing.

Yet, from the memories Ann provides, it is still possible to imagine her life. However, for the scope of this project, the possibilities of exploration are too great. For certain, analysis of Ann's diary should not end here. Mourning practices were an important element of Victorian society and could be explored in more detail, as well as the role Ann's schooling played in her life. Celebrations such as Ann's coming-out into society and the 1876 Centennial of the United States should be considered as well. The structure of Ann Eliza's dresses including corsets and hoop skirts should also be noted, as they were essential to creating the ever-changing silhouette that was so important for nineteenth-century women to achieve.

It is really quite extraordinary; from one simple sewing diary the life of an upper-class girl becomes clearer. Because Ann Eliza Lane Cunningham decided to integrate tidbits of her own history in with the fabric of her time, readers can interpret particular values Ann had. Of the

[82] Taylor, 130-132.
[83] Taylor, 122.

notations Ann made, many included family members or celebrations which they would be a part of. Ann also mentioned another joyous aspect of her life: her travels. But when looking over the pages of the diary, one comes across the wool fabric Ann associates with her uncle's suicide. This gives the diary a true sense of reality in that Ann Eliza was not a one-dimensional woman. She danced the Virginia Reel at her sister's fiftieth birthday party; was the center of attention in her two wedding gowns on June 12, 1856; went into mourning when her uncle died; and clothed her three children. Through Ann Eliza's diary it is possible to realize what happiness the world held for an affluent daughter of a sea captain, and the despairs that cross class boundaries.

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